

UW Medicine



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Delayed Reaction to IV Contrast

Follow-up and self-care

This handout tells what to do if you have a delayed reaction after receiving contrast (X-ray dye) through a vein during an imaging study.

What is IV contrast?

Contrast is a dye that may be given before imaging studies such as *computed tomography* (CT) scans, *magnetic resonance imaging* (MRI) scans, or *angiography* exams (X-rays of blood or lymph vessels).

Contrast helps veins, arteries, some organs, and other body tissues show up more clearly on the images. Contrast injected into a vein is called *IV contrast*.

What should I do after an IV contrast study?

After having an injection of contrast, drink extra fluids to help your body flush the contrast from your system. Drink 2 or 3 full glasses of water in the first 4 hours after your scan.

What is a contrast reaction?

A *contrast reaction* is an allergic reaction to the contrast. These reactions do not happen very often, but they can range from mild to life-threatening.

Symptoms of contrast reaction include:

- Sneezing
- Hives or an itchy feeling
- Tightness in your throat, or having a hard time breathing (*anaphylaxis*)



Drink 2 or 3 full glasses of water in the first 4 hours after your scan.

These reactions may occur right after the contrast is injected or several hours later, after you have left the clinic or medical center.

Do I need treatment if I have only mild symptoms?

If you have **any** reaction at all, you must seek treatment:

- See a healthcare provider **right away**. Do not ignore any sign of a reaction, even if it seems mild.
- If the reaction occurs **after** you have left the clinic or medical center, see below.
- You may need medicine to treat your reaction or to keep it from getting worse.

What if my symptoms occur after I leave the clinic or medical center?

If you feel you are having a reaction after you leave the clinic or medical center, follow these steps based on your symptoms:

Mild Symptoms

If you feel itchy or you are sneezing, or both:

- Call the phone number for your care facility, listed in the “Questions” box on this page.
- Ask to speak with a radiologist.
- Tell them that you just had an IV contrast study and describe your symptoms. The radiologist will tell you what to do next.

More Severe Symptoms

Go to the nearest Emergency Department RIGHT AWAY if you:

- Are having trouble breathing
- Feel tightness in your throat

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- ☐ UWMC - Montlake Imaging Services: 206.598.6200
- ☐ UWMC - Northwest Imaging Services: 206.668.1744
- ☐ UWMC - Roosevelt Clinic Radiology: 206.598.6868
- ☐ Harborview Medical Center Imaging Services: 206.744.3105
- ☐ Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center: 206.606.1434